

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 603

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 6753

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FOR AMBASSADOR VANCE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, APER, LA

SUBJECT: CUSTOMS STAFFING

REF: A) VIENTIANE 6143

B) STATE 187232

1. WE VERY MUCH APPRECIATE REPORT OF YOUR MEETING WITH CUSTOMS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES AND FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM CONFRONTING YOU. IN ORDER TO ENABLE YOU TO REACH ACCURATE JUDGMENT ON THE MATTER, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KNOW THE BACKGROUND OF CUSTOMS PROGRAM IN LAOS.

2. IN 1971, WHEN THE WORLDWIDE ANTI-NARCOTICS PROGRAM WAS LAUNCHED, WE HAD TO PRESS THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT (RLG) VERY HARD IN ORDER TO HAVE THEM ACCEPT A U.S. ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORT IN LAOS. THIS EFFORT WAS TAILORED TO U.S. NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES AND, QUITE NATURALLY, THE LAO NOTED THIS AND MADE CLEAR THAT POLITICALLY THERE HAD TO BE SOMETHING OF INTEREST TO THEM. WE, THEREFORE, INCLUDED PROGRAMS FOR CROP SUBSTITUTION AND DETOXIFICATION AND ADDED, AS REGARDS CUSTOMS, A PROVISION TO THE PROAG FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE LAO CUSTOMS SERVICE. IN FACT, HOWEVER, THE U.S. CUSTOMS EFFORT
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HERE HAS BEEN CENTERED ON DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE RLG

NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT CAPABILITY. TO UNDERTAKE NOW THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAO CUSTOMS WOULD COMPLETELY ALTER THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT PROGRAM. THIS NEW OBJECTIVE WOULD REQUIRE PERHAPS AS MANY AS EIGHT CUSTOMS OFFICERS AND WE SHOULD REALISTICALLY ENVISAGE A VERY LONG-TERM EFFORT OF AT LEAST FIVE YEARS IF WE WERE SERIOUS ABOUT ACHIEVING ANY RESULTS. IN EFFECT, TO UNDERTAKE THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LAO CUSTOMS IS TO PROPOSE A NEW AID PROGRAM AND, IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR OVERALL AID, SUCH A PROGRAM SIMPLY DOES NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIORITY AT A TIME WHEN WE MUST SEVERELY DEFINE OUR PRIORITIES IN THIS COUNTRY.

3. FOR THESE REASONS, WE REAFFIRM OUR VIEWS EXPRESSED IN REFTTEL A, THAT: THE POLITICAL SITUATION REQUIRES LIMITATIONS ON OUR STAFFING AND ON THE EXTENT OF OUR EFFORT IN LAOS; NARCOTICS FLOWING THROUGH LAOS INTO THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET IS AT THIS TIME VERY LIMITED; AND, THEREFORE, WE SHOULD REDUCE THE SIZE OF THE CUSTOMS GROUP. NEVERTHELESS, WE APPRECIATE THE PROBLEM YOU HAVE IN DEALING WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND IF, FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, YOU FIND IT NECESSARY, WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT YOUR PROPOSAL OUTLINED IN PARA 5/A OF REFTTEL B; I.E., ELIMINATING THREE FIELD ADVISORY POSITIONS DURING FY-75, LEAVING THE TEAM CHIEF AND ONE ADVISER TO HANDLE THE CUSTOMS ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORT. WE WOULD NOT RPT NOT WANT, HOWEVER, TO HAVE THE ASSIGNMENT OF THESE OFFICERS DEFINED AS THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAO CUSTOMS SERVICE. WE WOULD STILL PREFER THAT DEA BE TASKED WITH PROVIDING FOR LIAISON WITH CUSTOMS USING A FORMER CUSTOMS AGENT IN LINE WITH WHAT WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE RATIONALE FOR CREATING DEA AS THE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM ABROAD.

4. FINALLY, AS REGARDS U.S. CUSTOMS ANTI-NARCOTICS IN-COUNTRY TRAINING, WE RATHER FAVOR THIS PROPOSAL BUT WOULD WANT TO HAVE MORE DETAILS BEFORE TAKING A POSITION. SPECIFICALLY, WE WOULD WANT TO KNOW HOW MANY CUSTOMS OFFICERS WOULD COME FOR HOW LONG TO COVER
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WHAT SUBJECTS. THE ONLY SUCH TRAINING PREVIOUSLY PROVIDED WAS GIVEN BY DEA IN MAY 1973 AND INVOLVED FIVE TRAINERS FOR TWO WEEKS. THIS WAS BEFORE THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT.
WHITEHOUSE

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